Missouri Streams Fact Sheet

Glossary of Terms

B

Base flow—The groundwater flow that seeps deep down into the soil and is slowly released over weeks or months to a stream channel or spring.

C

Catchment area—1.) The collection of water, especially rainfall, in an area. 2.) A reservoir or other basin for catching water.

Climate—All factors that determine temperature, humidity, wind, precipitation, evaporation, etc. and can be affected by an area's latitude, elevation, vegetation, topography or nearness to the oceans or other large water bodies, among others.

D

Drainage basin—The area of land that drains to a common outlet at some point along a stream channel. Also called a watershed.

Drainage network—The entire system of channels on the land surface that transports water, sediment and other natural and man-made materials from surface watershed.

Drainage pattern—The dendritic pattern made by a drainage network.

E

Evapotranspiration—The process through which moisture from the surface of the earth to the atmosphere through evaporation and plant transpiration.

F

Floodplain—An area that is periodically flooded by the lateral overflow of rivers or lakes and/or by direct precipitation or groundwater.

G

Geologically normal rate of erosion—Erosion that occurs through the natural process of wind and water. This type of erosion is not influenced by land-use change.

Groundwater source area—All of the groundwater drainage in a certain area or watershed.

Gully—A trench or small channel formed in moving water's path of least resistance.

H

Hydrologic cycle—A pathway of the earth's water through precipitation, runoff and evaporation revolving in a cyclic manner. Also known as the water cycle.

Hydrology—The study of water distribution and circulation through the hydrologic cycle.

I

Impervious surface—A non-porous surface, such as a parking lot or rooftop, that does not allow water to soak through.

Infiltration capacity—The rate at which soil can soak up rainfall.

K

Karst—A geologic area made up of porous rocks like limestone or dolomite that has openings where water has dissolved rock cracks and between layers of rock, causing the rock to be permeable and therefore able to store water beneath.

Kinetic energy—The energy of motion.

P

Parent material—The materials that make up the geology of an area, therefore affecting soil development and bedrock.

Percolate—Liquid passing through a porous material.

Permeable—Allows fluid to pass through.

Physiographic region—A geographic area with a certain combination of land formation and rock type.

Precipitation—All liquid or solid water forms that fall to the earth.

R

Recharge area—An area of land underground that provides runoff to a stream or other groundwater systems.

Rill—A very small trench or channel that forms in moving water's path of least resistance.

Riparian corridor—A parcel of land that includes the channel and an adjoining strip of the floodplain directly adjacent to the stream channel.

Runoff—Water that flows over the ground and reaches a stream as a result of rainfall or snowmelt.

S

Sediment—Material that is eroded from its place of origin and is transported by water flow.

Sheet flow—Runoff that flows downhill on a land surface in irregular sheets rather than in channels.

Splash erosion—Erosion caused by raindrops.

Strahler method—A method of stream ordering.

Stream—A watercourse that holds flowing water received from groundwater and/or surface water, such as other streams or rivers.

Stream channel—An area that contains continuously or periodically flowing water that is confined by banks and a streambed.

Stream ordering—A stream classification system that is used to compare relative sizes of streams and sub-watersheds within a surface watershed.

Stream power—1.) The available power of moving water over a unit area of streambed. 2.) The sediment-transporting ability of a stretch of moving water.

Surface watershed—An area that encompasses all water whose surface is naturally exposed to the atmosphere, i.e. rivers, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, streams, seas, estuaries, etc.

Suspended sediment—Sediment that is suspended by the upward turbulent flow that stays in suspension for a length of time.

T

Topography—The study of the relief features or shape of the land.

Transpiration—The process by which water is evaporated from the pores of plants.

W

Water storage—A step of the hydrologic cycle that involves water's time on land before it is evaporated.

Watershed—The entire area drained by a system of connecting streams such that all streamflow added together in this area is discharged through a single outlet, i.e. a stream or river.

Watershed divide—A watershed's boundary to another watershed.